

The Terran Intervention

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Category: Mass Effect, Stargate: SG-1

Genre: Adventure, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-04-10 21:02:39

Updated: 2016-04-24 19:16:23

Packaged: 2016-04-27 20:22:25

Rating: T

Chapters: 2

Words: 10,054

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: It has been said that something as small as the flutter of a butterfly's wing can ultimately cause a typhoon halfway around the world. Now imagine what four zero point energy missiles over Shanxi could do. For want of a nail, civilizations will rise and fall.

1. Chapter 1

"_Hyperspace transition complete, Captain. We're holding 100 AU from the star,_" thought Navigation Officer Michaels over the neural network.

The report was redundant. Captain Burke's own neural interface gathered the same information directly from the ship. Should it be necessary, he could direct all the major functions of the ship solely from his chair. However, having a senior staff freed up the Captain to direct tactics and coordinate the ship as a whole.

"_Good. __Sensors, analysis please.__" Despite receiving the data directing to his mind, that didn't mean the Captain understood everything being fed to him.

"_I'm seeing__ a main sequence star of about 20 solar masses. Three orbiting planets, the second of which is terrestrial and in the habitable zone. Atmosphere is breathable if not a little heavy on the nitrogen." _As the officer was speaking, a holographic heads-up-display came to life in front of the Captain's eyes. It was much less taxing than having the ship project a mental representation. Various reference lines and angles showed where the _Atlas_-class vessel was in respect to the star and its invariable plane. All the orbital state vectors conveniently displayed for the Captain to see. "_Picking up multiple anomalies.__"

"_Multiple?_" The long range sensors had only seen one. Command didn't think that fluctuating amounts of dark energy could be a natural phenomenon and had sent the stealth vessel to

investigate.

"_The original signature is from an object in an orbit 40 AU from the star. Designating A1 on tactical map. It's not emitting any heat, built with a superdense alloy, and has an unknown element contained within," told the officer. "_The rest are in geosynchronous orbit around the habitable planet, contained within ships of unknown make. Designating B1 through 36." That was a surprise, the long range sensors should have been sensitive enough to pick the ships up. Not to mention the hyperspace detection network should've gotten them upon entrance to the system.

"_Captain! Detecting a vessel on approach at superluminal!" _Called out the sensors officer. "_Activity from the object, a ship just arrived near it! It's of the same type as the others."_

"_I__t's like a supergate," reasoned the Captain. "_W__hat do we have on these vessels?"_

_"No subspace radiation, but they're flooding the system with EM," _sensor officer Chambers replied. "_No trinium, no potentium, no neutronium. Primary antimatter engines acting as reactors, backup fusion. The dark energy readings are the only thing of note."_

_"Very Well. Michaels, prep the hyperdrive and plot a course for the first planet. Put it between us and them." _Ordered Burke.

"Tactical, ready the ship for silent running and go to condition 1."

A swirling maelstrom of green appeared as the dimensional barrier was breached. The hypnotizing whirlpool pulling the ship into its fathoms. No sooner did the ship enter did it leave. The hyper advanced, Alteran based, faster-than-light system taking seconds to travel millions of kilometers. The lumbering mass of a blue gas giant filled the enormous windows of the bridge. In truth the room had no windows and was within the ship, but you wouldn't be able to tell from the perfectly realistic projections.

"_Tactical, go full stealth," _commanded the Captain.

_"Full stealth, aye Captain," _replied the officer_, "Phase cloak is online, graviton dampeners at full."_

_"Sensors to passive," _called out Chambers.

_"Communication at silent," _confirmed the Comms station.

"_Ion__ engines offline and switching to inertial generator," _finished Michaels.

"_Plot a course for high orbit of the habitable planet," _ordered Burke. _"And sensors, bring subspace to active. If they don't use them, I doubt they can't detect them."_ A chorus of confirmations rang out to his orders.

The Captain prompted the computer to bring up a model of the unknown ships. The best way to describe them was avian. Thin wings sprouted from either side of the linear center section. Someone else might have been intimidated by the predator7 craft, but Burke had seen much

worse horrors. The subspace sensors of the _Into the Night_ left nothing unknown, every section of the ship mapped to the individual atoms. Burke made note of the railgun lining the center of the vehicle, and the missile silos on the sides. The thick, spaced, sloping armor showed the kinds of weapons it was designed to go against.

"_In_ _addition to__ the main core,_ _d__ark energy fields are projecting from small emitters on the outside of the vessel. This results in extreme repulsive forces, a kinetic shield," _whispered a hushed, seductive voice into Burkes mind.

"_Minerva, __how nice of you to join us_," Burke greeted the ship's AI. She was a human that had uploaded her consciousness; he didn't understand why anyone would want to do that. Then again, she could always have a new body cloned and download back into it.

"_I was busy reporting data to command._" Burke got the mental picture that she had just flipped her virtual hair in a rather indignant manner. "_Hopefully I don't need to tell you that they wish for us to observe and stay hidden."_

_"__Alas, I was hoping to go in guns blazing_," He had always had a rather peculiar relationship with the flirtatious virtual personality. With any other member of the crew he would have called it unprofessional, but dealing with an AI was always a little bit different.

"_Captain! You need to see this," _the sensors officer practically yelled into his mind. _"The vessels are full of a new form of life. But there are humans on the planet!" _

"_Indeed, and I've come to the conclusion that we have just stumbled upon a little battle,_" informed Minerva. _"Troops are being moved from orbit to the surface as we speak, thousands are already fighting on the ground. These vessels have established air superiority and are launched and recovering gunships. Based on what I see in terms of a defense garrison, this world will be occupied in weeks if not days."_

_"Humans are being attacked?" _asked the communications officer.

"_Let's not jump to any conclusions here. It is just as likely that they were the aggressors," _the Captain interrupted. Many human worlds had been encountered before, some peaceful and some aggressive. It was strange to find humans _here_, but not unheard of and it didn't change their operating procedures.

"_We'll find out for sure in a second,_" said Minerva, "_but first; look at this." _The AI streamed the subspace sensors directly into the Captain's mind. The advanced instruments created a 3D rendered video based on what was being detected. He watching, in his mind, as the ships knocked debris out of orbit. Minerva so helpfully provided a trajectory for their landing; directly into a city.

"_Are there any civilians down there?_"

"_There are humans without weapons or armor," _she replied. Captain Burke maintained silence for a few moments.

"_Their view on non-combatants may differ from our own. We still mustn't get involved without more information."_

"_What about this?" The main viewing screens, which had been showing the approaching planet, changed to a dark face. The bridge in the background was quite different from the clean, geometric style that the _Into the Night_ had inherited from the Alterans. A few thick rectangular pipes ran along the roof, orange holograms were in many corners. The room held an ergonomic characteristic, yet dull despite the plentiful lighting.

"This is Captain Winfield of the SSV Amiens. We've come under attack at the... Enemy is unknown. The science vessel has been destroyed. SSV A... been destroyed... We cannot... Hostile first contact, I repeat hostile first..." The replay cutoff abruptly; no static or warning, just a cut to black.

"_English?" _Asked Burke in confusion. "_They must be from this Earth..."

"_Well, those that are left,_" simmered the AI.

"_You've sent this to command?" _Burke expected she had, Minerva was always the most efficient.

"_Yes, sir. They're willing to let you act on your own discretion. But, you have to stay undetected."_

"_Very well,_" thought the Captain. "_You're really intent on getting involved, aren't you Minerva?"_

"_Their public and private networks make it quite clear who the aggressors were,_" _defended the AI.

"_Any luck on the ships' networks?" _Asked Burke.

"_Pillaging at the moment. Helpfully similar to the architecture of the humans, but I'll need lots to start a translation. I'm currently using any pictures or videos to piece together what I can. Still hoping I'll run across a golden record."_

Burke looked over the depiction of the alien battlegroup, "_Tactical. Where are their army auxiliary vessels?"_

"_The three closest to the planet, currently offloading to FOBs. Take those out and you stop the invasion dead in its tracks." _As armies got increasingly complex so did their logistical train. Once again, Alteran technology had eliminated most of these problems. But these aliens didn't seem so lucky. Removing food, fuel, munitions, spare parts, construction materials, or even something as simple as clothing could devastate an offensive.

"_Command and Control?" _Asked the Captain.

"_Their largest capital ship. It's sending, receiving, and routing a lot of comms from the fleet to the planet,_" _answered sensors officer Chambers.

"_Captain! Just found their first contact package. Picking apart the

language sample, translating and decrypting their... got it. Yeah, they started this school yard hustle. Their government has laws against using that FTL object," _informed Minerva.

"_Had the humans signed some treaty to abide by these laws?"_ asked Burke.

"No. This was first contact."

"_That's... completely obstructing the sovereignty of another state. They must be pretty presumptuous to think they can impose their laws onto an independent entity_" Burke said with unconcealed contempt.

"_Maybe these aliens see it as a matter of international law,"_ proposed Minerva, playing devil advocate.

"_No. T__hat would still be a consent based systems, and need treaties to be established between states," _said Burke. "_These are warmongers." _

_"I see we've come to the same conclusion," _remarked Minerva, sassily putting a virtual hand on her hip.

"_Load tubes 1-4 with Anglerfish_" Burke instructed his tactical officer. "_Minerva? Let's remove their logistics, but only knock their command out of action."_

"_On it!" _The coy intelligence plotting the best path for the weapons to take.

The Captain withdrew into a virtual battle-space. Modeled after the physical Asgard system, his neural interface placed him in a virtual 3D representation of the area around his ship. The software giving him complete situational awareness, icons and data representing everything the ships sensors could see onto a solar system map. Four dotted lines reached out from his ship toward the alien fleet, showing the projected weapon paths.

"_Ready to fire, Captain_" Stated the tactical officer.

"_Make those ships diasapear_"

"_Firing, aye Captain."_

On the outside of the _Into the Night_, four dark objects were ejected from the vessel. Once separated from the ship they returned to the universe from out of phase. Small inertial generators pushed them along in the darkness of the void. Passive subspace sensors, preplanned pathing data, and a tight-beam neutrino communications from the _Into the Night _ensured that the weapons were on the right trajectories.

A cloaking device bent electromagnetic radiation around the missile to render it invisible to radar and the eye, an old fashioned method compared to the _Into the Night_'s phase cloak. A small device inside dampened its presence in subspace, and coolant kept the outside the same temperature as the space around it. Any heat was dumped into an internal heatsink, easily big enough to last the entirety of the missile's mission.

Right as the missile reached its target a phase-shift device was activate. This device was not unsimilar to the phase-cloak employed by the _Into the Night_. But rather than being designed to eliminate all forms of detection; it moved the missile partly into another dimension. This allowed the matter of the missile to pass through into its target, unobstructed by shielding or armor.

Once reaching into the ship the missile would activate its payload. A small arcturus type device would extract zero point energy from the universe. The following explosion of exotic particles, the result of violating the laws of nature_, _would expand outwards in a devastating manner. Once these particles tore the missile apart, deactivating the phase-shift, they would continue to rip apart the target vessel. By carefully controlling the production of exotic particles, the Anglerfish missiles cold be set to a variety of yields.

There were no flashing lights, loud explosions, or expanding rings of fire like one might find in a movie. Only a few dull orange glows, the small amount of oxygen inside the ships being burnt up, before the three auxiliary ships simply shattered into millions of pieces.

The larger target, the command vessel, was actually a little more exciting to look at. The back end of the ship simply ceased to exist. The missiles causing the engines to lose magnetic containment of their antimatter, which proceeded to annihilate the back end of the vessel in a series of small flashes. It was like a small firework sparkler had been lit, pinpricks of light dazzling the eye. Where once were engines, was then a crater. The ship's external lights flickered in a few areas, trying to revive themselves on backup power, before finally giving into sleep.

_"Good hits. Three targets destroyed, one disabled and drifting."
_Called out the tactical officer. "_C4I support has ceased from the command vessel. __Others are scrambling, detecting small interceptors performing expanding searches."_

* * *

><p>Hope you liked this teaser! If you did please leave a review. I'm not actually writing this story until I finish my other one on Stargate: SG-1. But the plot bunnies were running around in my head.

2. Chapter 2

****Shanxi ****

****Alliance Command and Control****

General Williams looked down on the battlefield map. Marines had salvaged the invaluable piece of technology from Fort Jackson. The adjunct Junlong Space Port had come under attack, forcing an evacuation. The small orange holographics dreadfully announced his impending doom.

The fighting had started off well enough. The enemy simply couldn't

bring to bear enough fighters to gain air supremacy. There were no carriers attached to the invasion fleet, meaning the few air bases of Shanxi had numerical superiority. This wasn't much of a surprise, the logistics of making an invasion were horrendous. It took years for the invasion in D-Day to be put together. This quick reaction force had only two weeks. It's not surprising that a defending planet would be more numerous, as cargo is so limited in space craft.

Earth had millions of soldiers and tens of thousands of aircraft. It would take a literal armada to match those numbers in an invasion. Unfortunately, this wasn't Earth or Fortress Europe. Shanxi was a small but prosperous colony on the outskirts of System Alliance space. It's militia was nothing but a requirement, as set by the Anti-Piracy Act of 2122, not a real fighting force.

The people of Shanxi had it easy; the fertile ground grew food for several harsher colonies. The pre-planned cities were spacious with wide roads for future growth. Green energy sources had been prebuilt to meet the fledgling colonies demand. Homelessness and joblessness was low, and those were easily met with state shelters and soup kitchens. Exports were so profitable to the colonial government that taxes were nearly nonexistent.

Government provided education was so good and well supported that it tied the few private institutions. Medical advances made on Earth in the past century meant that health care was cheap and easy. Health insurance had become a non-issue in politics, as it took but pennies out of the government's pockets. The world was simply a paradise. It promised to be a jewel in the stars, the first colonists lucky to get there first.

But Eve had picked the forbidden fruit. The Garden of Eden was receiving a hail of fire and brimstone that would bury its people under piles of ashes.

The aliens threw their forces into the meat grinder. Tens of thousands sent to their deaths to destroy the two main airbases outside Jinyang. Shanxi didn't have the area denial to stop the incoming shuttles. Some surface to air missiles had the range, interceptors taking down a few shuttles. But the planet was highly unpopulated, and defenses centered around the cities. The aliens had an entire planet to pick their landing location, all they had to do was keep their distance from the main population.

When the enemy forces finally landed they setup a steel umbrella, several interlocking mass effect barriers. An impenetrable beachhead for continued reinforcements. As the shuttles poured down a withering network of GARDIAN lasers was erected to deterred any reprisals.

Then, thrust after thrust was sent to secure the defending air strips. The enemy hover tanks and personnel carriers methodically crawling across the uninhabited countryside. Each attack was nearly indecipherable from the next, an endless barrage of right hooks directly to the face. The enemy providing a textbook example of combined infantry and mechanized doctrine. But the defenders held on.

Mantis gunships turned tanks into slag, prepared gun emplacements slaughtered whole squads. Stationary artillery was untouchable under

shield generators, counter fire easily absorbed before the guns silenced their challengers. But it was a forgone conclusion. While Shanxi had an advantage in aircraft, the enemy was too numerous.

Man portable heavy weapons would occasionally swipe an Alliance plane from the sky, giving a quick respite in which the enemy forces would furiously charge forward.

Williams wished at that moment for the weapons of the United North American States. The stubborn coalition refusing to part with their heavy arsenal of incendiary and cluster munitions. If he could only lay down fields of micro-bombs, burn strips of Napalm Enhanced into the ground. Then he could have stopped the approaching onslaught, but politics had stolen the very weapons he needed straight from his hands.

Still, the General was lucky for what he had. What use was artillery against lightning fast pirate attacks? A few more years of lobbying may have seen many of his heaviest weapons removed. He was the leader of a militia, after all, not an army.

Soon the aliens had gotten close enough to the airfields that artillery couldn't elevate to continue fire. A desperate close quarters brawl broke out around the steel reinforced concrete blast walls surrounding the base. The artillery crews desperately built makeshift ramps to get a few extra degrees of fire, or used their guns for direct fire.

Once again, the aliens were in for a rough battle. But the discovery of the Mass Effect had given a massive advantage to attackers: shields. What good was a machine gun when the enemy had mobile cover protecting them in the open and allowing them to close into the defenses.

These were airstrips, not fortresses. Their biggest weapons were designed to protect from the air, the militia was charged with base defense. Very quickly they were running out of personnel. As casualties mounted the bases had to be abandoned, a tactical retreat to the capital.

A makeshift runway was constructed on the highway running through Jinyang. Anything not bolted to the ground was shipped to this new base. Taking ideas from his enemy, General Williams had ordered the shields stripped from the artillery emplacements. These powerful barriers were interlaced to give a last line of protection to his command center.

It wasn't the traditional Alliance base shield. But the use of several smaller emitters to create a mobile shield was an idea he readily copied. Additionally, the highway ran under the city for a good couple of miles. It was similar to the old Boston Big Dig, providing a perfect hardened fall back location and civilian shelter. This was where he had spent the last few days, putting all his time in the makeshift command and control area.

The initial assault on the city had gone well, bloodying the enemy in the new fighting environment. But the wide roads of Jinyang played right to the enemy, allowing them to push forwards in their tanks. It was only through prepared converging cones of fire that their lines hadn't been broken; and even then, several bridges and tunnels had to

be collapsed to prevent a break through.

And then everything changed. The aliens brought gunships to wipe out entire city blocks. Williams couldn't use the fighters that had been saved, then the enemy would swarm the area with their own. He wanted to save his aircraft for something big. So he had responded with man portable air defenses systems, the enemy responded with orbital fire. Small mushroom clouds blossomed as what once was a city became a grave yard.

So General Williams gave the enemy what they wanted, he pulled his men back. They formed a hasty retreat, not giving much in the way of resistance. Once the enemy had been pulled far enough into the city, he changed orders. Every man was to fight as if each building was the last. The line between enemy and friendly territory blurred and orbital support couldn't be called without friendly fire, if they even cared that was.

The urban warfare made the aliens invasion slow to a crawl. It was a form of combat perfected by humans in the middle east. Every building could have a fire team, any bag on the road could be an explosive, a sniper was looking down every alleyway. And just when the aliens had gotten used to ambushes and hidden explosives, he would switch tactics to full assaults to surround and infiltrate enemy positions.

Two days ago he had received a call for surrender. No doubt the aliens, identifying as _T__oreens?_, had just deciphered the first contact package. A message sent in peace, now being used in war. How ironic.

And surrender he would have to do. Not then, but soon. It wasn't a problem of munitions. Element Zero made ammunition last longer, they could last for a little while more. Eezo lightened vehicles meant that smaller amounts of fuel was needed to run them, he had a few more weeks. No, it was a problem of food. Soon General Williams wouldn't be able to feed the hundreds of thousands of civilians huddled under tents and sleeping on mats in the cold and damp floor of the highway tunnel. Soon he wouldn't have food to feed his militia. He cursed the people who decided to keep the massive food storehouses by the space port and away from the city.

That is where General Williams found himself. The enemy attacking from the north-west, gunships hammering city blocks, the occasional orbit fire support raining down _god be damned_ if they killed their own troops. He couldn't retreat, he had no where to go if he left the city. There weren't any prepared tunnels in the forests, or caves in the mountains.

If only he had a few more troops, a few more planes, a little bit more food. The enemy force was of a manageable size; you could only fit so many soldiers onto a ship after all, and their defense had already killed thousands. But most of the planet's farms lied in the opposite direct he could retreat to. If they tried to fight out a guerrilla war they would sooner starve than be killed by the enemy.

"General, we have action in orbit," called out one of his technical assistants. The young man, practically a boy, had his fingers flying over a communications table. The small console was dedicated to off

world comms, so it wasn't doing much but monitoring the enemy ships at the moment.

"Alert my commanders," first ordered General Williams. "Is it Alliance?" Hope filled the question despite General Williams' best attempt. Soon he would be at a point of no return, he needed help before then. Heck, he needed help now.

"I-I'm not sure, sir." Confusion evident in the boy's voice as he tried to interpret his readings.

"Not sure? It either is or it isn't," said the General as he walked over to look at the young soldier's console. "Well, spit it out."

"U-u-um, multiple enemy ships have taken fire. Their auxiliary attachment is destroyed and the dreadnought is silent, its in a highly irregular orbit," reported the boy, pointing to undecipherable information on the projection in front of him.

"Disabled?"

"Most likely, they've made no orbital correction attempts."

"But no sign of any friendlies?"

"No, sir."

General Williams considered this information. It couldn't have been one of his, there were no ground-to-orbital weapons installed on Shanxi. If it was the Alliance then a fleet would be engaging above them. But four ships randomly taking damage?

"Are they firing on each other?"

"No indications of that, sir."

"General," quickly saluted Lieutenant General Maitland as he entered the command post. He had been a divisional commander at the start of the invasion but had been given a field promotion. His unfortunate predecessor being caught outside the makeshift base shields during an orbital bombardment. Very soon afterwards Colonel Rupert arrived, he was the commander of the remaining air units formed up under the 2nd Air wing.

"We are going to go on an immediate counter offensive," explained General Williams after catching his commanders up to speed. "Colonel, we're going to need an immediate strike on their advanced airfields. If we knock them out of the picture with their auxiliary ships down, we'll have complete air superiority."

"Yes, sir. We should also take a look out at Lauderdale, recon shows they haven't even touched it," proposed the Colonel. Lauderdale an out of the way air base. The colonial government planned some expansions out to the far north east, so a small base had been built nearby. When the invasion started it was deemed too isolated and had been evacuated. It could still have spare parts, munitions, fuels, and practically everything their small air force needed.

"After we achieve a break out. General, their command should be

completely disrupted with the loss of their dreadnought. But we don't know how long that will last, we're gonna have to make this count," said Williams to Maitland.

"We can take advantage of the confusion and get the Second Armored Division out through I-80 tonight. Have them circle around and close on their flank while we launch a counter. If we time it right we could form a pocket, they wouldn't dare fire on us from above with their army in such a position. We've seen what a mantis can do to their tanks, if we get air support we could make it work," said the Lieutenant General.

"They've pulled most of their reserves up, haven't they? We could go for the throat and hit their beachhead, knock out the rest of their supplies," said Williams. The enemy hadn't had to worry about any rear-guarding actions, as an assault at this point would be counterproductive to William's defensive effort.

"Yes, it has left their logistics train relatively spread out and undefended. But the site is heavily defended by shields and GARDIAN, that neutralizes our advantage in the air," thought Colonel Rupert out loud.

* * *

><p>Into the Night

****Bridge****

"_We sure stirred up the hornets nest_" Bubbly laughter spilled onto the network from Minerva. The smallest alien vessels had begun aggressively patrolling around their damaged brethren. Small, one manned fighters had slipped right past the _Into the Night_ as they attempted to find the instigator. "_Command has reviewed the situation and agrees with your actions. They want you to maintain secrecy and keep our presence hidden."_

"_The defenders are making for a counter attack,_" observed the tactical officer. Screens in the bridge helpfully brought up scans of aircraft being prepared for launch, infantry moving out, and a whole division of armored vehicles exiting the capital city to the south. The powerful subspace sensors on the stealth ship allowed them to see straight through the ground and into the makeshift bunker formed from the highway tunnel.

"_The aggressors?"_ asked Captain Burke, swiping his hand through the air so that the virtual display scrolled to the enemy positions.

"_They've stopped their offensive,_" _answered the tactical officer.

"_Minerva. Is the analysis of the anomaly complete yet?"_ Questioned Burke. The AI had been tasked with looking into the multi-kilometer long device holding a distant orbit in the system. Their ship had gotten another good scan of it in action, as a vessel had left the alien fleet to use the device and go to super-luminal travel.

It was an interesting piece of technology, very similar in use to the ancient Alteran hyperspace conduits that led from the Milky Way to

nearby galaxies. At the same time, the device was completely strange. It worked on principles completely different than any studied by the United Terran States.

"_It is using a new element_, _same as both sides of this conflict_" started Minerva. "_With an atomic number of 0"_"

"_Neutronium? That's not new," _questioned the Captain.

"_No, it's completely different. A different isotope, and its orbitals and nucleus are structured weirdly. It shouldn't be possible, really," _said Minerva.

"_Shouldn't be possible?"_ quietly chuckled Burke, those weren't words often used by the AI.

"_We knew there were going to be differences_, _I just didn't think the laws of the universe would be changed_" protested the intelligence. "_I can list ten different reasons why this element should rapidly degenerate. It's got no right to be stable!"_

_"Captain!" _Interrupted the sensors post. "_I've got something_"

"_Show me_" commanded Burke, sitting straighter in his chair. The holographic representations of the FTL device fading away, being replaced by the alien Forward Operating Base on the planet below. The picture zoomed in, past the hurried arrival of shuttles that could not longer dock with the destroyed ships in orbit, past the roaming patrols and into a prefabricated building and down onto a storage container.

"_They're barley a Tier 5 civilization, Tier 4-C with this impossible non-element. No way this is their's_" said Minerva, complaining at how her structured world was filling with so many exceptions. She preferred everything to work out just like she thought it out in her mind.

"_No need to keep me guessing_" prompted Burke.

"_Electromagnetic__ based neural manipulator. Sitting right in the middle of their beachhead_" told Chambers, the sensors officer. "_Whoa! __I'm also seeing some serious nanotech. Definitely a third party tech here."_

"Same as the device?" asked Burke.

"_Well, they're both advanced compared to these civs but I'd need more details to see." _said Minerva. "_C__an't rule it out though."_

"_Interesting, let's pull it up. Not gonna leave it to them," _decided Burke. The _Into the Night_ could instantaneously transport matter through its Asgard derived, and Alteran upgraded, transporter.

"_Sorry sir, transporter is currently undergoing __maintenance_" winced the tactical officer.

"_Is the insertion team ready?_" asked the Captain, trying to push down his irritation.

"_I have then suited up already, Captain_" Minerva tried to placate Burke. The stealth ship had a four man direct action team assigned to it. In addition to the security forces already station onboard, these solider were specifically for any stealthy actions that the stealthy ship might need to be done stealthily.

"_Insert them_" commanded Burke.

* * *

><p>The four man team exited out of the back ramp of the Jumper Mark-II. The small orbital insertion vehicle was an upgrade of the Lantean gate ship design. It was a remarkably versatile craft, being able to fit through the gate with ample cargo space yet housing powerful engines and weapons. It's cloaking made it a mainstay of special forces since its original introduction.<p>

The Mark-II was simply a more ergonomic design than the original cylinder shaped craft. It had been slightly modified to be easily mass produced. All but two of the expensive interior drone missiles were replaced with particles weapons, as the missiles tended to be expended too quickly in battle.

The insertion team was equipped with top of the line stealth armor. The suits were fully mechanized but not overly bulky. They stuck close to the body yet had enough give for easy movement. The anti-gravity modules helped the soldiers move lightly in the armor, helped by the use of lightweight alloys. The full head helmets had no visors, that would be a weak point, instead with protective armored plates closing over the face.

Compared to regular infantry, or specialized heavy units, these stealth armors weren't that protective. Of course, they could decimate a 21st century battlefield. But they were mostly focused on stealth. The aforementioned anti-gravity modules helped keep a unnoticeable footfall. A plethora of cloaking devices kept the users from any sensors.

The weapons the soldiers carried were similarly inconspicuous. They were very clean looking, with curving and organic lines running on the outside. The best description would be to take a stealth fighter and turn it into a gun. Further inspection would reveal no barrel opening , just a small indentation at the front. The stun rifles fired quick bursts of small energy blobs. They could overload a nervous system or fry a computer, but did no environmental damage. Perfect for quiet work.

As the four man team exited out of the back ramp, they fell down the forty meters the jumper had been hovering. The whole time the shuttle and the men were invisible to any means of detection. At least, any means available to these aliens. The insertion team phased through the roof of the warehouse prefab building, before using thrusters to come to a stop on the ground level. The anti-gravity modules made it easy to use thrusters on a powered armor suit.

A main fusion reactor powered each suit, with subspace capacitors drawing extra dimensional energy as a backup. These power sources

supplied the hungry computers and technology in the suits. Said devices analyzing every part of the base around the soldiers.

Neural interfaces in the suits streamed data directly into the minds of the soldiers, and allowed them to use their minds to hack like an AI. To the soldiers it seemed as if there weren't any helmets on their head. Instead, each soldier had their vision completely reconstructed by the sensors of the suit. In the corner of their eyes a small map showed the movement of friendlies and enemies and the layout of the area. Icons identified everything from cameras to the closest enemy. With a stray thought these professionals could see through walls or zoom their vision onto the smallest piece of dirt in the room.

Flashing red warnings popped up, their suits warned that defensive measures were being taken. Some type of radiation was trying to interfere with the neural interfaces. Each soldier prompted their suit, and got an x-ray look inside the shipping container they had surrounded. A tripod propped up a piece of artwork. Two spiraling arms of matte white metal enclosed a pulsing blue light. It didn't seem too harmful.

Then again; Lantean head suckers didn't seem that dangerous either. But get too close and they would turn your brain into jello.

"Archer, Jackson. Secure the package," ordered the team leader.

The two men phased into the side of the shipping container, completely bypassing the locks and alarms on the front.

"Thing's rigged, shit will go down when we move it," reported Archer, looking at the small alarms attached to the device.

"Turn then off."

"Last one's mechanical, can't short it," told Archer.

"Shit," cursed Griffin, "Alright, Portland you're with me. We're gonna make some noise. Archer, when the fireworks go off you and Jackson hightail the package to the secondary extract."

The two special forces soldiers moved off through the ground level building, their HUDs guiding them to the best targets to cause a distraction. They stalked past massive store rooms of munitions, fuels, and other logistics before coming outside. A massive trailer like vehicle had clamped itself into the ground and was stretching an antenna into the air.

Griffin grabbed a small elastic strip off his hip and attached it to the underside of the shield generator. Within a few minutes he and Portland had raced to five other similar locations and planted more of these devices. With a thought the team leader had pushed information to the jumper on where to meet them.

"_Get ready_" thought Griffin to his team members. With small effort his mind cued his suit to activate the FREEZE (Free Electron Zone Explosive) devices. The small strips, when activated, caused a massive dispersal of electrons before self destructing. Like any ion weapon they wrecked havoc on electronics.

Looking back, the soldier watched as massive arcs of electricity covered the mobile shield generators. Above the base the shields began to turn opaque and flicker on and off. Finally the repulsive fields gave out as their emitters were wrecked from the electrical discharges. Eardrum damaging sirens rang throughout the entire base. Red lights flickered on and off on the sides of many buildings. An alien voice began to shout out overtop the commotion through a speaker system.

"_Sir, we're pushing to extract but we've ran into a prison block. Multiple humans," _called out Jackson over the neural net.

"_Your choice, just get to the extract. My ETA is five,_" responded the team leader. Griffin and Portland were pushing it to where the jumper would land, a small clearing outside the main concrete wall of the alien beachhead. A small depression in the grass was all that signaled the presence of the aerospace craft. Luckily, their helmets provided an outline of the invisible craft for them to see. The moment the two stepped across the threshold the interior became visible again.

Seconds later Archer and Jackson arrived, the latter supporting the artifact in an anti-gravity field. The wrist projected field easily supporting the heavy object. He set the device down on the floor of the jumper, an energy field quickly encompassing it to stop the harmful electromagnetic radiation.

* * *

><p>Shanxi

**Jinyang **

Underneath East Kings Road

Lance Corporal Norman Goodwin crept through the small underground cable pipe. Trying as hard as he could to squeeze through in his marine scout sniper armor.

The aliens' biggest mistake had been invading off first contact. They knew next to nothing about humans. They didn't know human fighting style, doctrine, the weapons and vehicles in service, or even the typical number of soldiers in a squad or platoon. But most importantly, they didn't know anything about human cities. All throughout the invasion the aliens had been ambushed and surprised by soldiers using their superior knowledge of Jinyang.

The invaders had been quick enough to block off sewage systems, check back alleys for cut throughs, eventually getting to know the favored IED tactics of humans. But they simply couldn't know everything.

Jinyang streets had been designed with the future expansion of utilities in mind. In addition to sewage pipes, there were large conduits for all the networking cables needed to satisfy the internet needs of modern civilization. As part of the current counter offensive, hundreds of marines were crawling through these pipes towards the aliens' lines. The marines would engage the defenders and hopefully use surprise to push them off their prepared defenses. This

would allow the 3rd Shanxi Armored Division to push forward without running head first into prepared anti-tank positions.

Goodwin pulled himself into an uncomfortable crouch as the squad in front of him came to a halt. He clicked off the lights from his helmet, sunlight streaming down from the entrance above. He stepped onto the knee of the marine helping people climb upward, giving a small push so he could grab a handhold above. Another marine helped by grabbing his arm and pulling him up over the ledge.

Goodwin looked around, they had exited in a giant server room. The cable pipe opened in a back maintenance room where the dozens of fiber optics ran to massively powerful computers. The marine platoon was quickly checking their weapons and forming up into their squads.

"Common marines, this op is kicking off in thirty minutes!" shouted out a Lieutenant to the last people climbing up out of the ground.

Goodwin waited for his spotter to climb out of the tunnels, before dragging him up the stairs of the office building. They quickly traversed up the fourteen stories to the top floor. The nondescript concrete steps quite the difference from the rest of the futuristic interior of the office building. They came out of the stairwell into a small foyer. Four unpowered elevators sat in the side walls and two glass doors led to an office space. Without a key card the doors refused to be opened, but the glass quickly shattered after a few hits.

The office area was eerily quite and empty. No forces had been up here, the small carrels and larger offices completely untouched. On one desk sat a giant bell with a sign reading, 'Ring when signing a new client!'. Goodwin led the way to the north western corner of the floor. He kicked in an office door, carefully checking each corner with his weapon.

The large area was no doubt for some big wig in the company. A television hung on one of the walls and three monitors were hooked together behind a desk. The rolling chair looked very comfortable to Goodwin's eyes.

Two giant glass doors ran floor to ceiling and led out to a patio. Looking out one could see the scared urban battlefield. Goodwin slung his pack off of his back, unpacking the M-82 Cobra from within. Meanwhile, his spotter carefully opened the doors leading outside. A bipod spread out from his sniper rifle and rested on the floor and a cloth was put over his scope to prevent any glares.

"_Overwatch-32 in position," _Goodwin said into his radio. Looking through his scope the marine tried to see the defensive line setup by the aliens. Using his HUD he marked a few locations with his rangefinder and pulled up relevant data like wind speed.

"Thousand two-hundred meters out, fast food sign on Fairfield street. Marking it on the HUD," said his spotter in a loud mumble, "Enemy roadblock setup just below."

"I see it," confirmed Goodwin. A series of barriers, made of a concrete like materials, protected a large machine gun and closed off

the four lane road. Swinging his camera around the sniper saw a few collapsed pieces of fabric that may have been used the night before as sleeping tents. A small amount of movement caught his eye from inside the next door building. "Eyes on hostiles, next door building. Small electronics store."

"Pushing info to the tac-map," said his spotter. A small red arrow appeared above the area and would be sent to the HUDs of the marines fire teams. "Two minutes," counted down Brady, his spotter.

Goodwin reached to his wrist where he activated his electronics to full. They had been running mostly silent to avoid the aliens picking up a spike in comms. Numerous little blue dots started appearing on his HUD. They were moving through buildings and back alleys, all making their way towards the enemy. Other red arrows appeared all along the enemy defensive line, showing where friendlies had marked enemy positions.

Looking into the corner of his vision, Goodwin counted down the seconds as his clock came to zero. Almost immediately several rockets leaped into the air. Looking through his sight, Goodwin watched the explosions as his fellow marines started the assault.

"Heavy weapon is being manned," called out Brady. Moving his scope Goodwin brought his crosshairs onto the machine gun. An alien had ran out to the gun without even putting his helmet on. The alien armor was distinctive, the chest and back expanding dramatically to cover the alien's thick carapaces. The sniper rifle automatically adjusted for range, drop, wind, humidity, and even the spin of the planet.

In between breaths Goodwin carefully squeezed his finger around the trigger. The force of a hypervelocity round leaving the barrel slammed into his shoulder. Thankfully, marine snipers were delivered specially designed armor with shoulder pads to mitigate the blow.

The single shot blew through the barriers and armor of the alien. Some had called the Cobra over-powered before the invasion. Paper pushers called for weaker firing snipers that could put more rounds downfield. They said more suppressing fire was ideal in modern combat, but mostly just wanted to axe the expensive anti-material rifle. The Cobra, after all, had a 2.5 second cool down after every shot and if shot too many times in a row could dangerously overheat. This meant it not only had a slow rate of fire but often had to be repaired from melting.

These aliens, though, had barriers much stronger than the alliance. The cobra could punch through them in a single shot while the weaker 'marksman rifles' took multiple. Considering the disadvantage human were at, Goodwin was glad he had the Cobra.

"They're going for armor," called Brady. Sure enough, several aliens were pulling camouflage off of a hovercraft. The alien armored vehicles were the heaviest of tanks. They had massive barriers and sloped frontal armor, with cannons that could decimate human tanks. Distinctive little wings swept back on both sides, just like their space vessels. The tank was just like the strict and slow fighting doctrine that the alien armies followed.

It was a far cry from the flexible tanks of the Alliance. The

Alliance called for swarm tactics, fast and cheap tanks that could provide a quick lightning assault of multiple rounds from the main gun. They were easily deployed, had a small logistical footprint, and kept in good maintenance. Suffice to say, the Russians had won out on tank doctrine within the alliance.

Unfortunately, the fact that the alien tanks were hovercraft rendered most of the maneuverability of the alliance tanks moot. Their barriers, armor, and guns furthermore completely outmatched humans. The armor battles were slaughters reminiscent of WW2 Sherman versus Tiger battles. Except the alliance tanks didn't have the luxury of a numbers advantage. The infantry situation was nearly as bad, but the flexibility and tactics of human infantry was much more effective than for the tanks.

Four shots rang out as Goodwin halted the alien's attempts to get into their vehicle. Seconds later friendly forces rushed through the position, trading fire with the enemy but letting their shields take the damage while they rushed for cover. Command should be happy with the capture of the tank.

Looking closer to his position, Goodwin noticed a column of alliance tanks speeding up through the road. He winced as one hit what must have been a disrupter land mine, its twisted form flipping over to the side of the road. The next tank quickly fired out a rocket propelled line charge to destroy the remaining minefield.

Goodwin tracked his rifle across his designated area, trying to find additional targets to neutralize. A loud crack told his ears that there was an enemy sniper on the field. One of the friendly marine fire teams marked an area on the tactical net that they thought the sniper was in. With some searching Brady was the first to spot it.

"Marking him now, roof of a small strip mall," whispered the spotter, as if the enemy could hear him.

In seconds the Lance Corporal had eliminated the threat, only waiting a moment for his weapon to cool before similarly taking out the alien spotter. Looking off to the distance he could see the approach of a few enemy gunships, their reaction to the assault almost immediate. But before he could mark them two friendly interceptors had already streaked by and wrecked the alien machines. One of which crumpled and distorted in the spectacular display of an exploding mass effect core.

"_Warthog 1-2 on station and ready for tasking_!" Came out over the radio as the aircraft prepared to drop ordinance on the alien positions. Flashing red circles speared on his HUD, showing where friendlies had called for close air support.

Goodwin reached back for his sweat rag. He pulled off his helmet and cleared the moisture poring down his face. There was something about seeing the life fall from a body that he couldn't get out of his mind. It didn't matter that these were aliens, that they had killed thousands of human. Seeing their bodies fall like rag dolls stained his eyes.

Slipping his helmet back on, Goodwin prepared for more action. The alien defenders were rushing to meet the unexpected human offensive,

running right into his scope. One after another fell to the ground with their weird blue blood splattering the ground.

"That's what I'm talking about! You just blew Roark's numbers out of the water!" Brady slapped him on the back.

"Shut up!" Goodwin pushed his spotter off. He took his rag, drenched by now, and wiped more sweat off his face.

"_We're pinned down in grid 232593, requesting immediate fire support!_" The cry for help knocked Goodwin back to his senses, pulling his helmet back on and lining the scope up to the HUD.

An armored personnel carrier had forced its way through a small maintenance garage and right on top of a marine squad. Reaching forward on his rifle Goodwin pulled a switch to activate the high velocity weapon mod. A short warm up over charged the capacitors in the weapon. Goodwin lined his sight up to the vehicle, aiming for where he learned the weapon operator sat.

A massive crack echoed out of his weapon and the force threw his shoulder into pain. Looking back down his scope Goodwin saw that the anti-material rifle had punched right through the armor of the vehicle and hit something important. The APC was now a flaming ball of metal.

* * *

><p>Shanxi

Alien Beachhead

"Jack!"

Explosions ripped apart everything. The face of terror collapsed down upon him. Fire. Fire everywhere. Thousands burning alive.

"Jack!"

A claw reached down from above. Suffocating everything it clutched.

"Harper wake up right this instant!"

Ships blotted out the sky. Descending upon the universe in the inevitable changing of the tides.

"We have to go!"

Jack struggled to pull in a massive breath. His whole body was shaking and sweat poured down his face. His vision was blurry, struggling to make out the light that flooded his eyes. A claw was reaching for him. The same claw. He jerked away, curling his body away from the terror.

"Jack!? Common!"

"W-what?" Eva? Jack blinked the stars out of his eyes. Shaking his head, the claw changed into a hand. Eva was reaching for him. Jack realized he was laying down on a cold floor. Looking around he saw a

small room with metal walls.

"This is our chance, we've got to go!" Eva grabbed Jack's arm. She pulled him through the sliding door that had been ripped out of the wall. He struggled to pull his feet underneath himself. He was so weak. He couldn't be weak.

"Where are we?" Jack rasped through his dry throat.

"The alien said he was taking us to his ship, he left us here a few minutes ago," she explained.

"Their beachhead..." he mumbled out. "How?" It wasn't a specific question, but Eva understood.

"I don't know. Something ripped the cell apart right in front of me," she explained, "explosions were going off and the guards had all already rushed away."

"Wait -Ben!? Where's Ben?" Jack turned hysterical as he remembered his fallen brother.

"They took his... body, when they threw us in there," Eva said softly. "Common Jack, he'd want us to save ourselves. We can come back again if we have to!" Eva tried to rationalize to Jack.

"No. No!" Jack pulled against her, forcing her to take a turn off the hallway they'd been running down. "I can... hear him."

Jack pulled Eva down several corridors, just barely managing to keep his feet underneath him. He took a left, then a right, and then another left. To Eva it seemed as if he was going in circles, but Jack appeared to have a destination in mind. Every blaring alarm and loud shouts out of the speakers urging them to sprint fast.

They rounded a final corner and came upon one of the aliens standing outside a large cargo door. The low ranking guard had no chance against the two experienced mercenaries. While Jack couldn't do much in his state, Eva was perfectly capable of snapping the neck of the avian beast.

Jack ran up to the heavy blast door. Banging his hands against the metal frame in desperation. Looking around, he noted the oddly shaped console on the wall. Taking a look down at the alien's weird hands, Jack realized it was a hand scanner. With help from Eva, Jack dragged the alien up to the door and placed its hand to the scanner. The door smoothly slid open after a short unlocking sound.

Eva picked up the alien's rifle, giving Jack the pistol. He was in no shape to be shooting the larger gun. They then proceeded into the next room.

Large metal cargo containers were stacked in a few small rows. The doors on the front of each had a glowing red console, obviously meaning they were locked. Jack walked straight towards one in the middle, taking hold of the pistol and delivering shot after shot into the middle of the console. The first few shots destroyed the computer, the next few wrecking the entire interface, and finally the small hypervelocity rounds destroyed the entirety of the locking mechanism. A gaping hole was where the lock used to be.

Eva moved to pull open one of the doors to the container. Jack was quick to move in. He stood still and quietly over a lumped mass. Eva quickly followed in after him, looking over his shoulder at the body of her friend. She moved forward and quietly pulled the cover off of him, but quickly jerked backward and let out a small scream.

"What did they do to him?" she gasped. Scars littered his face, under which a blue metal shined dully. His eyes were wide open and gave a small blue glow.

"It. Not they," quietly said Jack. Jack walked past Ben, bending over to pick up their confiscated equipment. He slipped on his armor and slapped his dual pistols onto his hips. A rustle of light over his body signified that his shield had activated. Eva followed his example.

"Pick him up, we're moving." Jack quickly left the container, leaving Eva to pick up their friend. She rushed out, struggling with the weight, trying to find Jack. She ran when she heard gunfire.

"It was here," Eva heard Jack say. Turning a corner she saw that Jack had broken into another cargo crate.

"What was?" asked Eva.

"It," said Jack with conviction. Eva understood; the artifact.

"Jack we've got to go!" Eva didn't know what was up with Jack. But they had to get out of here, then she could find out what was wrong with him.

"Alright," once again Jack moved with a purpose. He led Eva back out of the warehouse and through a series of hallways until finally coming to a door that seemed to lead outside. Unfortunately, the door refused to work. The door panel wouldn't come online.

"Did they lock us out?" asked Jack.

"No, look above us," said Eva. All the lights in the roof were out of power. "One of those explosions must've knocked them out of power."

"No, then the whole building would be out," reasoned Jack as the lights down the hallway were still working. "Almost like an EMP reached just this far." Jack pried the door open just like the cargo containers. First shooting the lock until there wasn't anything left, then pushing the door aside.

Jack poked his head around the threshold, looking for any sign of aliens. Looking out to the right he saw dozens crowding around one of their mobile shield generators.

"Looks like those explosions came from their shields going down," said Jack. "Must've been that EMP."

"Did the alliance do this?" asked Eva.

"No, they don't have any weapons that do that. Must've been a malfunction or something," said Jack. He then pulled Eva out the door

and quickly headed in the opposite direction of the aliens. They sprinted away, trying to escape before anyone noticed. When they came to the edge of the base they had to help each other climb over the tall concrete panels that the aliens used to stop shrapnel from artillery.

Jack knelt to the ground for a second, running his hands through the grass. Eva looked over and saw that the ground had a large depression in it, like something heavy had sat there.

"It was here," muttered Jack. "Why can't I hear it anymore?"

Eva quickly grabbed onto Jack and pulled him away. They needed to get as far from the base as they could. They sprinted towards a thin tree line in the distance, it would provide a semblance of cover. Jack collapsed as soon as they made it to the trees. He had never felt this exhausted and woozy.

"Common, Jack. They'll send out patrols as soon as they notice we're gone," said Eva.

"Just, give me a second," wheezed the mercenary. He then reached down on his armor for the radio. As soon as he turned it on voices instantly started shouting through.

"... _Wolf 1-5, __Warthog 1-2 checking in orbiting north 20 mikes at Angels 12. Ordinance is at full. 0+40 time on station. Ready for tasking, how copy? ... Overlord, Delta 3-2 engaging hostiles armor by shopping mall in grid 276839, request Broadsword support ... Overlord, Charlie 1-3. Relay to Bandit, good effect on target. Break. Enemy armor destroyed. Break. Request Bandit sweep left and clear hostiles in Charlie's AO. Over ... Charlie 1-3, Overlord copies all. Roger on Relay. Out ..." _

"Shit. We're missing the good stuff," laughed Jack deliriously, leaning against a tree trunk.

"What?" asked Eva. She was still on alert, looking around with her rifle in hand.

"Warthog... that's a mantis callsign. Delta and Charlie are full marine regiments," reasoned Jack. "Williams must be on an offensive!"

"Well what are you waiting for? Call us in some evac."

"_Overlord, Overlord this is Darkstar Actual. Authentication Mike Alpha November. Stand by for report, over,"_ Jack called into his radio,

_"Darkstar Actual, this is Overlord. Send your traffic, over." _Came back through the radio, a younger radio operator directing the flow of information all over the battlefield.

"_Shields over enemy FOB have been neutralized. Break. Enemy HVT-1 in FOB. Break. Darkstar 1-3 is KIA, requesting immediate evac. Break. How copy so far, over?" _Jack reported to command.

"Uhh say again line 1? Over."

"Shields over enemy beachhead are down! How copy?"

"_Solid copy Darkstar Actual. Routing a kodiak to your location, ETA 20 mikes."_

"Eva, we're getting out of here," said Jack, closing his eyes as he finally rested.

* * *

><p>AN:**

**Due to many comments and PMs I was convinced to write another chapter. Just don't be expecting very fast updates. **

**And please review more :) please. **

End
file.